

Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee Agenda-May 19, 2020
Office of Agriculture- Jeremy Criss

1. Call the meeting to order and Introductions
2. Approval of the April 21, 2020 Agricultural Advisory Committee minutes.
3. The Office of Agriculture continues to update our COVID-19 Agricultural Business Resources page published on the OAG website. Last week we added a page devoted to several on-line platforms to help them farmers with on-line sales and orders of agricultural products.
<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/agservices/boards-committees/guidance-for-ag-business.html>

We were informed that the custodian who cleans the Agricultural Activities Center tested positive for COVID-19. We developed a calendar that shows which agricultural agency staff have entered the building for the month of April and May. We are recommending that all these staff implement self-quarantine for the next 14 days. We have informed the MNNCPCC and the County Government of our recommendations.

4. We received the guidance from the Maryland Department of Agriculture for Pick Your Own Operations-We are working with Butlers Orchard, Homestead Farm, Rock Hill Orchard and we are helping to interpret the requirements. All employees are required to wear cloth face coverings including all customers age nine and above. The OAG is still working to assist the owners of retail agricultural businesses as the County and the State begin to open the economy.
https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland_products/Documents/Maryland-Pick-Your-Own-Operations-During-COVID-19-State-of-Emergency-FAQs.pdf
5. The OAG is partnering with the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation MCEDC and Visit Montgomery to help assist and promote agriculture. <https://thinkmoco.com/food-beverage-resources> Michael Protas from One Acre Farm received a Local Production Fund Grant totaling \$6,000 that he is using to retrofit his Ford Transit Van so it will have refrigeration capacity this summer when he transports food from farms to market. The MCEDC also implemented a new Telework Assistance Program where the County Council appropriated an additional \$1,250,000. The OAG asked if additional language could be added that would allow farmers to be eligible for these grants for COVID-19 related expenses. You can find all the necessary information here:
<https://thinkmoco.com/telework-assistance-fund>

We believe that Linda Lewis and Tim McGrath applied to the program for purchasing new computers to access ZOOM and other virtual meeting platforms.

6. 2020 Maryland Legislative Session -
<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0848F.pdf>- HB 848- passed and the Governor allowed it to become law without his signature. The HB 848 directs proceeds from the County Agricultural Transfer Tax for ag land preservation easement purchases and other ag programs. *Please note that County action on this bill will be delayed due to the fiscal crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic.*

<http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2020RS/bills/hb/hb0805F.pdf>- HB 805- passed and Governor allowed it to become law without his signature. The HB 805 creates a new occupancy of 100 people under Public Safety Section 12-508 and allows Montgomery County to use agricultural buildings for agricultural tourism for occupancies up to 100 people.
7. The County Office of Agriculture was awarded a Rural Legacy Program-RLP Grant of \$2,704,500 on January 8, 2020. The Grant Agreements were executed in March however, COVID-19 pandemic may negatively the County receiving these Grants. The County informed the State that we will require an extension of the RLP Grant Agreements if the State delays action on the RLP Project Agreements.
8. Update from May 5, 2020 County Council Work Session on the Office of Agriculture FY21 Operating Budget. The OAG is continuing to work with the Montgomery County Food Council on the Food Security Task Force to assist with developing plans for COVID-19. The OAG is helping the Food Council on incentives to encourage farmers to expand local food production and to participate in a Farm to Food Bank program with Manna Food Center and other non-profits. Several local farms have seen increases in CSA customers as well as on-line sales for curbside pickup of local food.
9. The OAG is working with the Council on suggested changes to the definition of agricultural education and tourism. The Council members are talking with Drew Baker from Old Westminster Winery regarding the farm his family purchased on Burnt Hill Road. Drew is proposing opportunities for off the grid overnight farm stays in very small accessory structures.
10. During the MCFB meeting on May 5, 2020, Todd Greenstone told everyone how he was turned away at the County Transfer Station with debris from the farm. When we investigated the situation, we learned that Todd's employee did not have a letter explaining that he works for an essential farm business. We followed up with Todd and explained the OAG has a template of this letter on our COVID-19 Agricultural Businesses Resource page.
11. The OAG received a request from the Department of Transportation- Transportation and Engineering Division regarding the replacement of single lane bridge along Schaeffer Road. Please refer the attached messages for details on this bridge. The Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board and the Montgomery Agricultural Producers have already provided letters with recommendations.

12. Next Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting June 16, 2020???

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

Agricultural Advisory Committee-May 19, 2020

Montgomery County Farm Bureau Board of Directors- June 2, 2020

Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board-June 9, 2020

Montgomery Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors-June 12, 2020